



**Mind Cultivation in Buddhist Spirituality**  
**by**  
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I think the reason why the notion of "mind" is emphasized here is because in Buddhism, when one begins to take an interest in spirituality, in spiritual matters and starts to embark on some kind of spiritual journey or spiritual quest then the initial departure point if you like is not about some kind of belief in god or some kind of super-normal power, that one has to believe in before one embarks on the journey. I am not saying that Buddhism is atheist or Buddhism denies the existence of god, all that I am saying is that at the beginning, as a Buddhist, first we have to understand ourselves and everything that we know anything about ourselves and about reality, whatever that might be, we can only understand these things from the kind of mind we have: our mind, the structures of the consciousness, the functions, states and processes that would determine what we experience. This is true on many different levels, from the very basic sensory level of sensory impressions to our cognitive mental activities. Even while I am speaking my mind is saying all sorts of things, should I sit down or should I stand up and move about and talk, which one would be more comfortable, but I'll put that aside. So that being the case we have to deal with our mind or our consciousness. Also it is only through understanding our mind, our consciousness, that we can actually even think of developing as a spiritual person, as a spiritual being. Because if it weren't for our mind then we would not even be able to speak about spirituality and we cannot hope to aspire to develop various spiritual qualities and attributes. In order to develop these we need to utilize the mind that we have. So now, when we do this, when we utilize our own mind that we have, what gradually we'll come to also understand is that mind functions according to Buddhism on two different levels. Which is to say that mind functions on one level, which is the cause of all of our misery, frustration, pain and suffering. But then it also functions on another level, which has the capacity to free us from the sufferings and the pain that we experience. So the capacity to find relief from suffering is something that we can obtain from our own mind as well.

So, this is why we have to be very careful I think, even though I won't be able to go into any great detail about the Buddhist understanding of the mind as such, nonetheless, I am going to put some emphasis on this idea of not thinking of the mind in Buddhism as we would normally think of the mind. Because in Buddhism, the mind that we experience normally, the empirical aspect of the mind, that is just one level, and then there is another level of mind which is not the same as the mind that we are familiar with. This is why we talk about the deluded mind and the non-deluded mind. We do encounter many problems in terms of translation, finding adequate terminology to get the meanings across. But non-deluded mind in Buddhism is called wisdom mind "yeshe" and the deluded mind is called "namshe." But "namshe" and "yeshe" are very different and to get that

idea across is quite difficult. And if we do not make this distinction then I think that when we talk about mind cultivation in Buddhist spirituality for example it is very easy to think this means that I have to cultivate the mind that I have, I have to deal with the mind that I have experience of, the mind that thinks, that anticipates, that remembers, that worries, that has this, that and the other thoughts, that gets caught up in all forms of discursive thoughts and all kinds of conceptual proliferations. So if we think that way then we are mistaken, because what we have to cultivate is not the mind that we normally have experience of, we have to learn to transcend our normal states of consciousness. And so what we have to cultivate is the cultivation of the non-deluded mind, the wisdom mind.

So as a spiritual person, gradually, from training, through mind cultivation or mental training, Lojong for example – Lojong means mind training – and many of you would be familiar with this practice, with this kind of training. What we are then learning to do is to learn to gradually function on this level of non-deluded mind, the wisdom mind.

So therefore, mind cultivation or mental training should not really be seen as just a form or technique of psychological manipulation or psychological modification of certain every day experience of consciousness. Just simply manipulating different psychological states does not lead to what we call liberation. Now, what that means is that the mind that we normally have conscious experience of, this mind then is not free. This mind is not free because of how it functions, it functions in a very habituated fashion, the mind, how it functions is determined by the thoughts that we have, emotions that we experience and feelings that we have. So all of these experiences then leave imprints in our consciousness, which basically contribute towards the distortion of how we perceive the world. As I mentioned earlier, from the Buddhist point of view, whatever we perceive we perceive according to the structures and the functions of the mind. So how we perceive with our normal consciousness is illusory, is distorted. And the reason is because distorted forms of thoughts and conflicting emotions govern our normal function of consciousness; what sort of feelings we have, what sort of things we think about, what sort of emotions that we experience, these all go towards perpetuating delusory states of mind. So therefore we cannot free ourselves from seeing things in an illusory fashion.

In Buddhist mental training then what we are trying to do is reverse that process so that we can begin to operate from another level of consciousness, which is not just about manipulating our everyday experience of consciousness, different states and so forth. But it is another, it's like a higher if you like, it's a higher states of consciousnesses which is non-deluded precisely because there's a sense of, for lack of a better expression, perspicacity or clarity. Because our normal consciousness, according to Buddhism, is in fact not at all conscious, as it is said, it's like we're half asleep, so the delusions, their effect on the consciousness is to dim our awareness so the mind becomes very dull and dimmed. Therefore mind's ability to function fully is jeopardized or compromised and so it's robbed of its full potential to function. I hope I am expressing this okay because sometimes it's not very clear to me you know (laughter). So what we call wisdom consciousness on the other hand is perspicuous, lit up, literally lit up so that one's ability to

perceive things clearly is increased and this is what mind training or mental training requires.

In this way I think it's quite important to see that in Buddhism when we talk about mental training we are not just simply talking about psychology, because this is a genuine kind of spiritual exercise, mental training is a spiritual exercise. I don't want to use this expression, but I will use it anyway and I hope you won't take any offence, but it's not some kind of psychological gimmick. Basically what I am trying to say is that these kinds of techniques are not designed to give us specific insight into certain specific areas of our life. One of the things that I have said is that it's not about you're doing this Buddhist mental training and then suddenly you get this flash of insight that says you finally realise why you have been eating so much and where your fondness for food comes from. But sometimes people do think this way though. I think that people think that Buddhism should help them to work through the pain of going through divorce or other unpleasantness of life that one may experience. But again, as I said previously, that does not mean through Buddhist practice all of these kinds of pain and unpleasantness may not decrease, I mean that may very well happen, but that's just a side effect, that's not the point of mind training. Mind training is to develop what we call "yeshe" or wisdom mind and try to gradually free ourselves or extricate ourselves from the influence of "namshe" or ordinary consciousness, the ordinary consciousness that is so habituated in such a way that it only brings about more misery and pain upon ourselves and on others. So, in this way mind cultivation is Buddhist spiritual practice, there is no separation; Buddhist spirituality would not exist if it weren't for mind cultivation. Because it is only through this that we are able to learn how to overcome the negative states and tendencies of the mind.

So this is the difference between these two forms of consciousness. So when we start, as what we call ordinary beings, ordinary sentient beings, most of us are on this level according to Buddhism because our lives are completely governed by the "namshe" or the deluded mind. Then we train and gradually the influence of the "namshe" or ordinary deluded consciousness decreases and conversely the greater powers of the non-deluded consciousness or wisdom consciousness begin to develop. And then eventually, as Buddhists we speak about attaining enlightenment, so to attain enlightenment means the "namshe" or the ordinary deluded consciousness has completely ceased to operate and there's only non-deluded wisdom consciousness remaining. So the Buddhas then, their mind in that way is completely different to ours. And I think this distinction, even though it may appear to be obvious in some ways, actually is not seen that way by many people. I think there is a strong tendency for us to psychologize things that are spiritual. So I think it's wise to resist that temptation while appreciating the importance of the use of various psychological techniques including psychotherapies of various sorts. At the same time we are able to make distinctions between these kinds of methods to that of Buddhist mind training in the context of mind cultivation.

Because our ultimate aim is to become someone who is totally transformed, there has been a complete change, a complete transformation in that individual's state

of being, what we call that being's mental continuum. So there's a complete break and this is I think an extremely important notion. Often I've heard in the West it is said that Buddhist practice is nothing but just being aware, and if you are aware then you will be in the present, and if you are in the present you are less likely to be overwhelmed by negative states of mind, and if your mind is then not disturbed by these states of mind then that is enlightenment, there is no difference. But that is not entirely true you see. Of course we have to start with mental training, we have to start with that state of awareness in terms of our psychological states. But true awareness has to come from the wisdom mind, not from the deluded state of mind that is aware. Simply because one's own mind is aware and is in the present, that does not lead to liberation. If that were the case then all the tennis players would be enlightened by now, because they have to focus, they have to be in the present. I mean their life depends on it. I think it's an important distinction to make. You see, here we are talking about two different types of awareness: there is the psychological awareness which we cultivate in terms of mind training, mind cultivation, but that should then lead to spiritual awareness. So spiritual awareness has to result from our practice in terms of maintaining awareness in terms of our normal psychological state. I hope this is making some sense. Because you see, what we have to realise is that our delusions are very deep and it's not so easy just simply to be aware and to be in the present and to think that this state of mind is that mind of non-deluded consciousness or wisdom mind, because it is not. This is what I am saying. Even the deluded mind can be aware. Of course the deluded mind that is aware is far superior to the deluded mind that is not aware, but still it's a deluded state of awareness which one needs to overcome and transcend through one's practice.

So in terms of Buddhist meditation then, when we practice mindfulness, awareness, those two being the key, with that we are learning how to give rise to "yeshe." Now, in addition to this practice of mindfulness and awareness and so forth, in Buddhism, in order to overcome the delusory states of mind just the simple practice of mindfulness, awareness, even meditations on the four Brahma viharas, four infinities of meditation on love, compassion, joy and equanimity are not sufficient, because again what is lacking is wisdom. So if we are unable to access the wisdom mind then even our effort to do these kinds of meditational practices will not give rise first, to what is called transcendental knowledge – I don't want to bog you down with details in a public talk – but first, transcendental knowledge which then is transformed into wisdom, we also make this distinction between those two as well. But in any case we have to cultivate wisdom. The cultivation of wisdom has to come from not just simply trying to calm our mind and trying to get some kind of handle on our unruly mind and all the disturbing thoughts and emotions that continue to proliferate. So we may manage to do that but if we do not have insight then nothing is overcome. So from the Buddhist point of view then we have to really know about the wisdom mind, first of all we have to learn what it is that stands in the way between the wisdom mind and oneself. That according to Buddhism comes from many different kinds of distorted forms of thinking. So mental training is not just simply designed to calm one's mind with Shamatha meditation, meditation of tranquillity, which is what we do with the practice of mindfulness, awareness, and also trying to train ourselves in terms of our emotions, the experience of emotions. According to Buddhism,

emotions in themselves are not evil or base. In Buddhism there are emotions that will perpetuate delusions and defilements and there are emotions that will not do that, in fact, some aid us in developing wisdom. So we have to understand that also. Therefore meditation on the four infinities of love, compassion, joy, equanimity etc., are designed to deal with that aspect of ourselves.

But the most important practice is insight meditation because without insight meditation then we cannot really cultivate our mind to a degree where we would be able to operate from the level of the wisdom mind. So this then requires us to realise that everything that we experience, just generally speaking, again without going into any great deal of details, what happens is that whenever we have an experience, first the experience that we have is based on some kind of distorted way of thinking so what is perceived is misperceived, misinterpreted. Because, according to Buddhism, our consciousness is not something that is passive and simply receives the information coming in through our senses, but consciousness is an active agent and consciousness determines how we perceive things, what we perceive and so on. That being the case, what we perceive is misperceived or misinterpreted and then secondly a fixation develops based on that misinterpretation. "Trulpa" means basically we misperceive, we misinterpret. Then "zimpa" means to seize onto that, to become fixated. So we become fixated on our own delusory, misperceived misapprehension, so called reality. I don't want to make it too involved and use too many Buddhist terminologies here but I think what I am trying to say is quite clear. Even when we see tables, mountains, chairs, things of that kind, according to Buddhism we misperceive these things because we do not only just perceive mountains, chairs, houses, people and so forth but we perceive mountains and chairs and tables *as* this and that and so forth and *as* having some kind of enduring material essence, that they are solid objects, that they exist independently of our mind and they have some kind of self existing, self sufficient reality of their own. These are all supplied by the mind, the tables and chairs and mountains and so forth they are not throwing themselves at us saying we are solid or that we are made of material stuff, again this is a projection, a fabrication of the mind which then says well these are called things, which have thinghood and they have material essences. So then having misperceived these things to be such and such then we become fixated on that "zimpa," our mind seizes on to that and latches on. And from that then develops all forms of other kinds of mental reactions of attraction, aversion, likes, dislikes, craving, grasping, resentment, hatred, all forms of things of that kind, which then of course lead to untold suffering and misfortune for ourselves, according to Buddhism.

But anyway, if we do not have insight, then of course through Shamatha meditation we can train our mind to become a little bit more calm and a little bit more tranquil and learn how to not get to agitated and worked up while we are meditating and so forth. And gradually we may begin to learn how to express ourselves emotionally in a healthy, constructive, beneficial fashion both for ourselves and others and become an effective individual and to be able to engage in meaningful activities. If our emotional side is completely nullified then of course our life will be poorer not richer for it. But even if we do all of that, without insight, as it is said in Buddhist teachings we will still be sort of nice people, just a

nice person who does not harm anyone who has this obsession of wanting to help everyone, (no just joking). So we have to first of all gain this insight into things and realise that, as I was saying before, learn to see how the mind imputes all kinds of characteristics, attributes and so forth on to things that are fictitious. So one has to lessen that and if we lessen that then all the other types of training, mind cultivation types of practices that we do, then fall into place, everything then falls into place. If it wasn't for insight then as I said the transition from the normal deluded consciousness, from "namshe" to "yeshe" or wisdom consciousness or wisdom mind is not possible, we still will remain in that state of delusion. According to Buddhism there are many different kinds of delusions, some delusions are harmful, completely harmful and destructive, then there are other forms of delusions which are more subtle and they may not be so harmful in any real obvious sense but in fact they may bring about some kind of benefit in the short term. But still this will prevent the individual from being able to fully realise freedom because only when we break through, break into that higher, for want of a better expression, figuratively speaking, higher form of being, up to that point we will remain bound. Even if we cultivate virtues for example – in Buddhism we talk about virtues and vices and so forth. If we do this in meditation or in relation to ethics, either way, even if we try to avoid the vices and try to cultivate virtues without insight the virtues will only lessen the effect of delusions for a period of time and we may gain benefit from the virtues we have cultivated. But this will not lead to what will call enlightenment; it will not lead to full attainment of freedom. So this is why in Buddhism we have to practice all of them together with the utmost emphasis placed on insight. So mind cultivation in essence must have insight as an essential component of one's practice, otherwise one will never be able to make that transition from the level of "namshe" or ordinary consciousness to the level of wisdom mind or wisdom consciousness.

So I will stop here and if you would like to make comments or ask questions you are most welcome, thank you.

### Questions

**Question:** It seems to me that "namshe," is sort of like the mind that you categorize and so on and so we know a little bit about lots of things, and "yeshe" is kind of the mind that knows one thing totally and clearly?

Rinpoche: "Yeshe" according to Buddhism is based on understanding. First of all, understanding that **everything** that we perceive has only contingent existence, everything is contingent on causes and conditions and everything is subject to change. And there are no discreet things or entities; everything is interdependent, that insight has to be present.

**Student:** At the moment that would be this....

**Rinpoche:** It is not about thinking that mountains and chairs do not exist. In Buddhism to think that these things do not exist is called the nihilistic view. So that has to be avoided. All it means is there are no such things as material things

as we understand them, as having some kind individual self-sufficient existence, because everything is dependent on something else, something other than itself. And even in terms of, I mean apart from causes and conditions and other factors, even in terms of time and space one thing is located somewhere else in relationship to something else. And in terms of time something coming before something else or after something else and so on. So what you have to understand is the sort of patterns of relationships rather than seeing discreet things like billiard balls or something, a group of billiard balls, if that makes any sense. And in Buddhism if you understand that that is called emptiness. So in Buddhism real insight, wisdom, must be based on understanding emptiness. But emptiness does not mean something that doesn't exist, or some sort of pure vacuity, or nihilistic expression, like that. But there are no material things basically.

**Student:** There's an emptiness of projection is it?

**Rinpoche:** Yes. I mean, for example, how do you define things, how you classify things. You can classify things and identify things and so forth, define things, in many different ways and on many different levels. There's not one single definite or absolute way to do that. Because you have to understand that also in terms of context, in what kind of context you're defining. Chair is a chair only in that context, when it's a chair. Chair is not a chair in other sense.

**Student:** To an ant it's a mountain.

**Rinpoche:** Yes.

**Question:** Can you define the difference between love and compassion?

**Rinpoche:** Love is defined as that feeling and attitude that we develop that says that, I wish that others have the cause of happiness, happiness and the cause of happiness. Compassion is defined as the wish that others may be free of suffering and the cause of suffering. So one says "may they have something that they want," the other one says "may they be free of something that they don't want," that is giving them the pain and suffering that they do not need or want.

**Question:** How to we come to experience emptiness?

**Rinpoche:** First we understand this intellectually, we come to understand this intellectually and conceptually, so this is contemplated on. And then through meditation practice we experience this to be true, we have genuine experience of it directly. But first our thinking has to change, this is what we are talking about. First we have to start to think differently to how we normally think and this will allow us to see things differently, even when we have some kind of intellectual understanding suddenly we find ourselves seeing things in a different light. Even if that understanding is intellectual. But then with meditation we come to have direct experience of emptiness, which is wisdom. So first transcendental knowledge and then wisdom.

**Question:** Maybe you could help me with a metaphor, in this modern age we are into computers and programming and it sounds as if this temporal cognition is like a program, you know the program, we think we are programming, our basic nature you know like a ship out of a, I'm just working with a metaphor trying to see if there is a current....

**Rinpoche:** Well, basically it's sort of like a movement from something, the functioning of the mind which is very mechanical and very predictable to a more fluid mental way of operating, which is not so rigid and mechanical and, what is the word, programmable if you prefer. So, how the mind expresses itself becomes more free and so therefore more far ranging and more effective. Because it can then operate in ways that one was not used to or not....

**Student:** More like a programmer?

**Rinpoche:** Yes, whatever. I think just more free to express itself than before. Because we are locked in so there is no variation. How our mind functions is very predictable.

**Student:** So transcendence means trying to step out of the program.

**Rinpoche:** Yes. I think. I mean I'm just guessing. This is why in Buddhism we say that Buddha has infinite different ways of communicating with others because Buddha can adapt himself or herself to various different kinds of situations in relation to different kinds of people. It is said often in the teachings. So obviously this suggests that Buddha mind, the wisdom mind, is not locked into this system of operating in a certain predictable way.

**Question:** Can you become enlightened without becoming a Buddhist?

**Rinpoche:** You can't become enlightened without being a Buddhist! I wouldn't go that far. But I would say that unless one does these kinds of practices then probably one would not become enlightened. That is sort of comparable to certain Christian theology also, and mystical teachings as well of the approach of via-negativa. You know, there is the via-positiva and via-negativa. So instead of saying god is infinite, god is all powerful, god is all loving, etc., you then strip away all of these attitudes and so forth and god is nothingness or something like that, or something, as Master Eckhart for instance said. But again, I'm just guessing here you know. But obviously there is some kind of affinity there at least in the language used. Again, it's about letting go of our fixation on things as "it is this." You know it definitely "is this." Because what we think is this, as I was saying before, I mean can be perceived differently, can be classified differently, can be valued differently, and I mean it's infinite. As it is said in Buddhist teachings there are as many infinite ways to perceive something as there are number of human mind's. And that obviously is true. Whenever there is more than one person, disagreements arise. And with me I don't need anybody else (laughter), I disagree with myself all the time. But this is really what Buddhist means though. I mean when we are talking about anything in generality then of course there's agreement but when we start to go into defining more specific

features of any kind – I mean not just even about things but situations and events and places and so forth – then we can't agree on it. But this is what Buddhism is talking about. So instead of thinking what I'm perceiving is the reality we should be thinking, "yes, what I'm perceiving is what I'm perceiving" rather than what I'm perceiving is the reality and everyone else is misperceiving it (laughter).

**Question:** Does the wisdom mind see things differently or is everything seen as the same?

**Rinpoche:** Well I think in terms of seeing how things are there's no difference in terms of wisdom, what wisdom mind perceives, it's the same. Let me put it this way, even with wisdom mind, what wisdom mind perceives is the nature of things and wisdom mind also experiences the relative aspect of things. There is the wisdom that enables us to perceive the nature of things as being emptiness and the wisdom which allows us to perceive the extent of things. So the relative truth and absolute truth I suppose, in that way. So in terms of how things are then there can be no difference. But the variety of course exists on the relative level, that is perceived even by Buddhas. Being Buddha would not be such a good idea if everything becomes the same, then one could get lost in that sameness.

**Question:** Can you explain dualistic perception?

**Rinpoche:** Dualistic ways of thinking is part of the fixation I was talking about. Dualistic fixation is the gravest of all. For instance, the fundamental dualism that we perceive is the dualism between the self and other. So from the Buddhist point of view it is never said that, well there's no distinction between self and other at all, that is not said in any of the teachings. But what is said is that, to go to the opposite extreme and say that self and other are totally different is dualism, and that self and other have no relationship, that self and other are totally disconnected, that's again a misperception.

**Question:** Can one simply focus on the wisdom or insight aspect?

**Rinpoche:** I think in Buddhism, of course that danger can be there, but in Buddhism compassion and wisdom must go together, they are inseparable. And it is pointed out again and again especially in Mahayana Buddhism – the later form of Buddhism that is practised in many countries – the emphasis is really on both. But still wisdom is valued higher, but still, without compassion there can be no wisdom it is said. So one cannot simply think of spiritual practice as a form of mental quietitude. Contemplation on insight for instance has to be supported by compassion. You see, because it is said that through cultivation of insight we realise the Buddha's mind, through the practice of compassion we realise Buddha's physical body. So true expression of the Buddha's physical body comes from the practice of compassion and the full expression of Buddha's mind comes from the practice of wisdom. They must be conjoined and in the teachings compassion and wisdom or insight is said to be like two wings of a bird. So in a similar fashion, to stay afloat, to not suffer from imbalance, to not lose balance in spiritual practice we have to have both. Because it is said without wisdom

compassion alone will lead to sentimentality and wisdom without compassion will lead to denigration of the relative world, which we will be part of as long as we are alive, even subsequent to having become Buddha or some elevated spiritually evolved being.

**Question:** What about engaging in certain work out of compassion, like in the government, is that accepted in Buddhism?

**Rinpoche:** I can't say too much about politics. But certainly some kind of social activism, if it means introducing social reform, social changes and social structure, doing things of that kind would be incumbent on genuine Buddhists for sure. Because in Buddhism for instance, the contemplation on the four infinities is done in order to help us to develop love, compassion etc., in a more authentic and purified form in our everyday life. It does not mean that if you do this kind of meditation then that is sufficient, you don't have to worry about love and compassion in daily life. These meditations are supposed to help you to maintain that kind of more genuine and authentic, and less corrupted forms of these types of emotions in every day life so that you can bring benefit, more benefit to others and oneself. But even though I said in later Buddhism, in early Buddhism also there is no difference, insight and compassion must go together, they cannot be separated. When we say compassion, in Buddhism compassion is like a generic term, it covers many different kinds of "other" regarding emotions and attitudes, it's not simply about just one thing of wanting to help others but many different emotions, attitudes and feelings that are "other" regarding and not self-centred, self-regarding.

I think I'll stop here. Thank you.

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